

13. UNUSUAL COMMUNAL NEST-FEEDING IN SOUTHERN
SMALL MINIVET *PERICROCOTUS CINNAMOMEUS*
CINNAMOMEUS LINNE

The WWF-I, Nature Leadership Camp at N.D.A., Pune from the 20th to the 25th of September 1982 coincided with the nesting season of many birds in the vicinity. During this period, while leading the participants on nature trails, I observed the nests of the Yellowcheeked tit (*Parus xanthogenys*), Whitebellied minivet (*Pericrocotus erythropygius*), Redvented bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*), Tailor bird (*Orthotomus sutorius*), Rain quail (*Coturnix coromandelica*), Baya weaver bird (*Ploceus philippinus*), Spotted munia (*Lonchura punctulata*), Tickell's flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*) and Small minivet (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*).

On the 24th of September 1982 at 9.35 a.m. while photographing the nest of the Small minivet (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*), I made an unusual observation which I think is worthy of mention. This nest was located on a teak tree (*Tectona grandis*) at Peacock Bay of Khadakwasla lake. The tree was on the embankment of the road about seven metres high and the nest was at about four metres height from ground level, thus, well protected, though near the road. The tiny fibre cup nest was welded on to the upper surface of a branch and was almost invisible as it merged with the tree like a knot on the branch.

There were three chicks in the nest as I could see them peeping out when the adult birds alighted on the tree. Initially I saw a female feeding the chicks with a caterpillar, while an adult male alighted on the tree with an insect in its beak. As soon as the female moved aside, the male approached the nest and fed the chicks. After a short while the pair moved away from the nest. Four minutes

later, I saw a pair of adult males coming to the tree with insects in their beaks. Very soon, both the males, one after the other, fed the chicks in the nest. Almost at the same time another adult male attracted my attention with a *chit—chit* call from a nearby tree. Immediately after departure of the two males, a third male also arrived at the nest and fed the chicks with an insect. I began to suspect that the nest was in possession of more than two birds and continuing my observations with interest I found that one light coloured female and four brightly coloured males, singly or in pairs, were feeding the chicks at an average interval of 3½ minutes. I continued observation till 11.00 a.m. and saw the birds feeding the chicks with caterpillars, insects and spiders and twice, just to confirm my suspicion, all the birds — one female and four adult males arrived at the tree simultaneously and fed the chicks one after the other. This behaviour has been described for the Jungle babbler — "...the four adults were all queued up like a line of waiters bringing dishes to a group of diners." (Macdonald, *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 56: 132).

An hour later, I brought a few camp participants to the site and showed them the strange communal activity of the small minivets. Once again I confirmed that the nest was in possession of five birds — one female and four males.

The small minivet has been consistently known to have nests in possession of three birds, two females and one male (Jesse, *The Ibis*, II, 1902: 541). Jesse however did not know whether both females take part in incubation and in rearing the young.

In 1950, K. K. Neelakantan has reported in his 'Stray bird notes from Malabar' (*J. Bom-*

bay nat. Hist. Soc. 49: 554) about the small minivets, a male and two females, sharing the labour at a nest — from building the nest to feeding the chicks. He did not say anything

about sharing the duty of incubation and was not sure whether the less active female was a chick of previous brood.

LAXMI NARAYAN BHUWAN,
G. D. AMBEKAR MARG,
BHOIWADA, PAREL,
BOMBAY-400 012,
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ULHAS RANE

14. OCCURRENCE OF WHITEBREASTED LAUGHING THRUSHES (*GARRULAX JERDONI* BLYTH) IN GOA

The report on the ornithological survey of Goa by Robert B. Grubh and Salim Ali (*J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 73, No. 1) refers to an "excursion... made to the top of Vagheri in Valpoi taluka, just under 1000 m, and said to be the highest hill in Goa. This was specially in order to establish whether or not the plant genus *Rubus* (brambles) and its symbiotic bird genus *Garrulax* (laughing thrushes) also occur in Goa as both do in the Kerala ranges a couple of hundred metres above this elevation. While bracken (*Pteridium* sp.) another regular member of this plant-bird association, was plentiful near the top, there was no sign of *Rubus* or *Garrulax* although otherwise the biotope seemed eminently appropriate."

I visited the forests of Goa with a few members of WWF-India, from the 6th to the 10th of April 1982. Our visit was confined to the localities of Castlerock-Dudhsagar, Molem and Mayem lake. On the 6th of April, at about 18.00 hrs, while coming back from a trek along the Kali river at Castlerock, I saw an active flock of babbler-like birds. The birds were not shy and they kept moving from tree to tree, sometimes descending to shrubs and undergrowth. Closer inspection revealed them to be Whitebreasted laughing thrushes in a flock of

about 30. They were feeding on the fruits of Atki (*Maesa indica* Wall.) a medium-sized tree abundant in the evergreen forest of Castlerock and on the fruits of *Luvunga eleutherandra* Dalz., a scandent glabrous shrub common in the forest. Occasionally they would come down to the ground presumably for insects. The birds continued with their noisy feeding activity for a while and then gradually disappeared into the thick forest behind.

Next day, i.e. on the 7th of April, we trekked along railway track from Castlerock to Dudhsagar waterfall. At about 15.00 hrs, just before Dudhsagar railway station, a mixed hunting party of birds was seen in the valley to the west. The party included four Redvented bulbuls, three Yellowbrowed bulbuls, eight Jungle babblers and fourteen Whitebreasted laughing thrushes. Along with the bulbuls, the laughing thrushes were seen feeding on the fruits of Gol (*Trema orientalis* Blume), a common forest shrub. At times the thrushes were seen hunting for insects in moss-covered branches of trees and on occasion they would come to the ground along with the babblers. The party moved after sometime.

The first sighting of the Whitebreasted laughing thrushes was at Castlerock which is